

BACK HOME, IN PENNSYLVANIA

By Mary Helen Pendel

Back home, in Pennsylvania, I sleep in my great-grandmother's bed. It's a mahogany four-poster of delicate proportions.

My Great-aunt Sarah died in this bed at the age of 93. My Great-grandmother Buckley died here, too, years before I was born, while the bed was still part of the homestead in Carbondale, a booming northeastern Pennsylvania rail and coal center at the turn of the century.

Grandma Buckley gave birth to 18 children in this bed—my own Nana and Great-aunt Sarah among them. Among them, too, a Great-aunt Kate whose experience in covered wagon treks West I had heard as a child.

I don't think of it much—the procession of family back into the past who have felt this bed. I know about them. I'm not conscious of thinking of them. But they're there.

Where are the lines of demarcation between past, present and future? Easier to conceive of, perhaps, in my Los Angeles office, in a building that was once a house before it was broken into pieces and moved to Hollywood from Bel-Air.

So often in Los Angeles people speak with satisfaction of the brand-new, the untouched. Not so back home.

Perhaps it is not totally by choice. In Carbondale, it would be hard to block out the fact that others have been where you now are. The streets that accommodate your car are paved in the hill sections of the city with wide lanes of brick on each side—to afford yesterday's carriage horses surer footing in the rain and snow. Stone hitching posts embedded with iron rings are still seen curbside in the fine old residential sections of the city.

The tiny side lights in the bedrooms—a well-loved decorating effect of the early years of this cen-

tury—combined dependable gas with that new-fangled electricity in each fixture. Bathrooms in the finest older homes were apt to be huge—bedrooms turned to the purpose when indoor plumbing was the latest rage.

Where the house is large enough, things are not so much thrown out as set aside, moved to the cellar, the attic, and sometimes, in our case, to the third floor—an area the full size of the house, lined between dormers with bookcases holding the spill-over from my father's library downstairs. The books have spilled over again onto tables, chairs, chests and in boxes and share the space with portable closets of 1950s' formals and bridesmaid's dresses, with cedar chests and discarded toys and stacks of memorabilia.

People long gone—some known to us, some known only to the house—are still with us. Someone provided the needed, practical things we unthinkingly look for and find in the cellar. The cellar is large and four-roomed with a huge closet off the laundry lighted only by a high window. In addition, there is the furnace room, the fruit cellar, and huge old coal bin that years ago was fenced each fall with boards across its doorway, then filled to the ceiling with coal—anthracite—against the winter. Today it dwarfs the wicker couches, tables, chairs and the rugs we store for porch use each summer.

Thoughts of that cellar came to me recently as I went to purchase a stoneware crock. Nobody buys a crock back home—they just go down to the cellar. They'll find one there along with the length of pipe or bamboo pole, the earthen jars and basins, the glass bowls and discarded cooking pots that moderns use for planters, the piece of copper screening, the rolled piece of rub-

ber, the discolored ball that still bounces, the tins, the jars, the boards of varying lengths and widths and woods, the chamois cloths, the paint rags, the sticks, the pruning shears, the nails and screws and washers that no one ever remembers buying.

How can one paint or pot or fix things in an apartment? There's no room for provisions. There are no provisions when one must consciously anticipate their need and acquire them all for oneself.

Given a long, lazy afternoon with nothing special to do, I've poked around in the cellar. The carved side chairs Mother started to refinish years ago. Grandpa's old desk. The screens Nana and Aunt Sarah used in their dressmaking establishment before the turn of the century, back when Nana set the styles of Carbondale, Pennsylvania, with the size of her bustle.

My dressing table chair is an old, refinished swivel piano stool; my mirror, set into an ornately carved gold frame that we acquired with the house.

There are things to discover in the cellar.

But not for my nieces and nephews. They "go up third floor" to rescue and reactivate old playing cards and chips, wind-up trains, prom programs and souvenirs, football programs, baseball scorecards, the Ping-Pong table, dolls and stuffed animals, games with strategic pieces missing, children's books, scrapbooks, marbles, their mother's wedding gown, baskets, an old typewriter.

But we put those things there—my sisters and I.

And down in the cellar we're beginning to find discarded bats and junior baseballs, Mickey Mouse Club hats and sombreros, stones and keys and old paper dolls that a newer generation trails behind it. ■

Rosemary Heth gave me this. A reader of the News sent it to the paper.

730 AM - WSP arrived and I put the things to be microfilmed into the Eagle. I arranged on Tuesday evening to borrow the car. I rode out to the Golf Course with WSP and went in the house for 20 minutes-- WSP & HLRP had breakfast. at about 8 AM I left & went to 46 Canaan where

I had Connie notary the PHMC form. No whole family was there -- JVB was "all decked out" in new clothes, which he had purchased the preceding evening: Nike shoes, denim slacks and a Penn State football jersey. Connie "did" the form and I drank a cup of coffee with her. Jack drove me 3 1/2 hrs down to the high school. I left and went to the Post office and mailed the PHMC report & got a certificate of mailing, which is shown herebelow.

I wanted to make a copy of what I sent to Greenlee but no copying machines were available -- which is very irritating/annoying!

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